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Concern over the implementation of the Common Core standards in schools and new teacher evaluations seemed to boil over in January, helped by a critical column written by one of my middle school teachers, Elizabeth A. Natale, that reached hundreds of thousands of education supporters nationally.

The strongest critics would abandon the Common Core standards and the new, high-stakes teacher evaluation system, which would be a mistake.

Here's the thing: Standards are nothing new. Federal and state standards for various subject areas have existed since the 1980s. And so, as we move more deeply into the millennium and its new expectations and demands, we have moved into a new generation of standards.

This change is good.

What is not good is the marriage of the new teacher evaluation system to the new standards. We need to break these two up, and leave the teacher evaluation system for another day.

Embracing change is difficult in any sphere. In 1862, Abraham Lincoln addressed the problems associated with change in a message to Congress: "The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew and act anew."

Excellent teachers strive for continuous improvement. Asking educators across the system to learn how to effectively implement a more rigorous curriculum takes time. We have never had to complete such a massive overhaul of our math and English language arts curricula — grades kindergarten through 12 — in such a tight time frame.

Change theory teaches us that getting across the bridge of new initiatives — in this case new standards and curriculum — takes time and ongoing support. We are in a marathon, not a sprint. To put in place a new teacher evaluation plan as school districts implement this new curriculum is hugely problematic, because it compromises the positive results we are seeing from the new state standards.

I believe we must teach from rigorous standards, ones that will lead our students to be prepared for success in the future. I also believe in accountability. Educators must be responsible for doing everything possible to ensure all children meet or exceed high standards. But it is not right to hold educators accountable for a new initiative they are just learning, using assessments that are ambiguous and incomplete.

In West Hartford, we began implementing the new state standards two and a half years ago through a collaborative process that involved teachers and curriculum leaders. When this school year closes, we will have the new curriculum fully in place.

By the end of last year, parents and teachers were noticing the increased rigor in the work the children were doing. Teachers have said to me, "Teaching to the Common Core standards has made me a better teacher." This is fantastic news.

We are moving ahead. Do we want to saddle our system — and our hard-working, innovative teachers — with what is being perceived as a huge obstacle to the new Common Core standards, just when we have built up a good head of steam? We want the implementation of the new Common Core standards to be a shining example of what our schools can accomplish, not a train wreck.

Gov. Dannel P. Malloy was right to slow down the rollout of the teacher evaluation process. Change that actually works takes time. Let's treat the new standards with the patience, respect, and care they deserve. More important, let's treat our teachers — the very lifeblood of our educational system — that way too.

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